



MDwise

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Depression: Supporting Someone Who Is Depressed

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Introduction

If someone you care about has been diagnosed with depression, you may feel helpless. Maybe you're watching a once-vibrant person slide into inactivity or seeing a good friend lose interest in activities that he or she used to enjoy. The change in your loved one's or friend's behavior may be so great that you feel you no longer know him or her.

You probably want to help in some way. This topic will give you the tools to do so.

- Depression is a disease. It's not being lazy, and you can't "just get over it."
- The best thing you can do for someone who is depressed is to help him or her start or continue treatment.
- Offer support. You can do this by understanding what depression is, being patient, and offering help.
- Don't ignore talk about suicide. Talk to a doctor, or call **911** or emergency help if needed.
- Reassure the person that he or she will get better with the right kind of treatment. Treatment depends on how severe the depression is and includes medicine, counseling, self-care, or a combination of these.

How can you help someone who is depressed?

Here are some things you can do to help:

Educate yourself

The more you know about depression, the better you can understand what the person is going through.

- Know what is true about depression, and know the myths about depression. Myths include thinking that depression isn't real or that you're weak if you're depressed.
- Know the warning signs of suicide, such as talking a lot about death or giving things away and writing a will. If you notice them, call the doctor.
- Call **911** or emergency help if you think:

- The person is going to harm himself or herself or others. For example, the person has a written plan or a weapon or is saving (stockpiling) medicines.
- The person is hearing or seeing things that are not real.
- The person seems to be thinking or speaking in a bizarre way that is unlike his or her usual behavior.

Help with professional treatment

If you have permission, you can:

- Help the person set up and get to visits with a doctor or other health professional.
- Help the person manage medicines.
- Know the side effects of medicines and contact the doctor if needed.
- Remind the person who has depression that medicine is important and that the dose or medicine can be changed to reduce or get rid of side effects.

Home support

A person who has depression may feel alone in the world. Your support can help.

- Listen when the person wants to talk. If you're there to help the person talk things through, it may help the person feel better or continue treatment.
- Avoid giving advice. But gently point out that not everything is bad, and offer hope. Urge the person to continue treatment. Don't tell the person that he or she is lazy or should be able to get over it.
- Keep your relationship as normal as you can, but don't pretend that depression doesn't exist or that there isn't a problem.
- Ask the person to do things with you, such as go for walks or to a movie, and encourage the person to continue with favorite activities. If the person says no, then that's okay. But be sure to ask again in the future. Don't push too much, which may make the person feel worse.
- Ask what you can do to help in daily life. You might help with housework or lawn care, getting the kids to school, or running errands.
- Don't be offended. If you are a spouse or are very close to someone, you may feel hurt because the person isn't paying attention to you and may seem angry or uncaring. Remember that your loved one still cares for you but just isn't able to show it.

Take care of yourself

Spending a lot of time with someone who has depression may be hard on you too. These caregiver tips can help:

- Take care of yourself first. Do things you enjoy, such as seeing family or going to movies.
- Don't help too much. A common mistake caregivers make is providing too much care. Even if they don't admit it, people like to help themselves. Take some time off.
- Don't do it alone. Ask others to help you, or join a support group. The more support you have, the more help you can give to the person.

For more information, see the topic Caregiver Tips.

Credits

Current as of: June 16, 2021

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RR2022_191 (11/2022)